Was there a particular way of knowing that was most important in the decision about whether Data was the property of the Star Fleet? Why or why not?

I believe there was no particular way of knowing that was the most important in the decision. I believe all four ways of knowing played an equal role. Firstly, in the argument for considering Data the property of Star Fleet, Riker used all four ways of knowing to show why Data should not be considered a human being.

He played on Emotion, showing how Data is vastly different to a human being. This I feel also acted on a primal human instinct of ‘us against them’. He was using negative emotion to try and get Data to seem like a more hostile and negative thing rather than a friend.

Secondly, he used Reason, (although I feel it was an irrelevant and therefore invalid pattern of reasoning, which is addressed later,) and effectively said that if Data is not human, they should not treat him as a human. He is a robot and so is a toaster, therefore if we consider a toaster property, we should also consider Data property. This is also a logical fallacy, a false analogy. He assumes that because Data and a toaster are alike in a certain aspect, they must be alike in other ones too.

Thirdly, he used Language to differentiate between Data and human beings. A good example is when he asked Data what he is, and Data responded with “An android.” When asked what an android was, he explained that it was a machine that only looks human. This further set data apart from humans, showing how he was different from them. Another good example is when he asked Data how quickly he could process information, and Data responded with a number far beyond the speed of humans. This also further alienated Data.

Finally, he used Sense Perception to show how Data may appear human, but is definitely not. He sort of showed how Data looks like a human at first glance (though slightly greener-skinned), then turned it around and showed how upon closer inspection he didn’t really seem human at all, by detaching his arm, and turning him off. He showed how looks can be deceiving.

However, all this didn’t ultimately answer the question, is Data property? Data may not be human, but neither are the aliens on board, and they are not considered property. So what do we look at?

In the argument against the consideration of Data as property, all four ways of knowing are again used. In the argument for the consideration of Data as property, various arguments are made. These are all either debunked or seen as irrelevant when they make the argument against the consideration of Data as property. Firstly, they ignore the fact that Data is a machine; so are humans, just a different kind of machine. The point is: is Data a sentient being?

Firstly they use Language and ask the ‘hostile witness’/expert how they would define sentience. Then they show how Data fits all three criteria of sentience, therefore he should be defined as sentient.

They then further this argument by using Reason. If Data is sentient, and we do not treat sentient beings as property, then we should not treat Data as property. They also debunk the irrelevant pattern of reasoning from earlier. Just because Data is not human does not mean he is not sentient.

Thirdly, they use Sense Perception, to show how Data may be different from humans, but he is also very alike. He keeps medals for sentimental value, and has had an intimate relationship with a woman, something you don’t expect from a machine.

Finally, they use Emotion, to nail in the fact that if they rule against Data’s favor, they will be forcing a sentient being to become property, which is likened to slavery. This really makes the court think twice before making a final decision, as their ruling could have serious repercussions as policy.

So I believe that, much like in everyday life, all four ways of knowing are used equally to make a decision on things, and all four are important.